

Bee Families

Of the seven worldwide families of bees, six of them have representative species in North America. However, only the species belonging to five of these families – Colletidae, Andrenidae, Halictidae, Megachilidae and Apidae – are commonly encountered or likely to turn up in your garden. Many of the more common, or “garden variety,” native bee members of these families are the ones featured in this App.

Taxing taxonomy

The scientific names for the bee genera described in this App will always be indicated (in italics, as is the convention) because, as you will quickly discover, the common names are often not definitive. For instance, the same common name can be assigned to two or more bee genera; a good example of this is the usage of the common name, “sunflower bee,” which is variously associated with the genus *Svastra*, or *Diadasia*, or even *Melissodes*. Conversely, the bees belonging to some genera have earned multiple common names. *Melissodes*, for example, is usually called a long-horned bee, but as an exceptional pollinator of sunflowers, it is also referred to as a sunflower bee. Then there are the native bees for which no widely accepted common names have been derived at all, as is the case for the genus, *Trachusa*.

To help make this native bee taxonomy a little less taxing, we’ve provided a table or “bee tree,” of common North American bee genera. This table, which includes family, subfamily, tribe and genus, should enable you to visualize the taxonomic relationships among North America’s native bees, and become familiar with their scientific names.

Garden variety North American native bees

The types of native bees that are likely to be attracted to your garden will of course be relatively dependent upon the North American region in which you reside. But the following overview offers a seasonal introduction to some of our more common garden bees, most of which are widely distributed across the continent.

In addition to seasonality, another important clue to the identity of the bees you observe, are the types of flowers on which they forage. Included then in the general description of the various garden bees in this overview, are a few of the flowers from which they are known to collect pollen and/or nectar. For more detailed information on the bees presented below, including a more extensive list of their preferred forage plants, consult the [bee profile](#) pages of this App.